

Folsom ends Legislature's deadlock

Lt. governor's gavel sets aside Macon County electronic bingo legislation

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MONTGOMERY | Lt. Gov. Jim Folsom used his gavel Tuesday on a contested voice vote to end a filibuster over bingo legislation that had tied up the state Senate since late February.

Despite a motion for recorded votes on all Senate issues, Folsom approved a voice vote to set aside a proposed constitutional amendment that would have regulated electronic bingo in Macon County. The bill threatened to kill what's left of the 2008 legislative session, which has only five working days left.

"I have an obligation to the people of this state to see their issues addressed," Folsom said.

Proponents of the bill began the filibuster to stave off a vote while they tried to round up enough support to pass it. They were unable to get the necessary votes, and Folsom opted for a tactic that met with harsh criticism from some senators and praise from others.

"With all due respect, you have violated the rule book and violated the Constitution of Alabama," Sen. Hank Erwin, R-Montevallo, told Folsom, a Democrat. Although Erwin opposed the bill, he had helped sustain the filibuster.

Sen. Lowell Barron, D-Fyffe, said he favored the action of his fellow Democrat. "It is time we broke the gridlock," he said.

Sen. Phil Poole, D-Moundville, said he wanted the filibuster ended much earlier. "It was obvious they were not going to get the votes," Poole said of the backers of the bingo bill.

"They had more time than any legislator can remember on any bill," he said.

The resentment built up over the past two months of stalling carried over into discussions of a special order calendar of non-controversial bills.

When Sen. Ben Brooks, R-Mobile, began filibustering one of Barron's bills, Barron threatened to use his power as Rules Committee chairman to kill Brooks' bill on insurance for the storm-ravaged Gulf Coast.

“You’re acting irrational, you’re not acting in the best interest of the people of the coast,” Barron said.

The Senate calendar is so stacked with Senate and House bills that have yet to be considered that the clerk’s office printed the list in two volumes because the equipment couldn’t handle printing one thick calendar.

The proposed bingo amendment, sponsored by Sen. Myron Penn, D-Union Springs, was sought by Milton McGregor, owner of VictoryLand dog track in Macon County. The bill would have modified the regulation of bingo at the dog track and protected it from certain court rulings that have adversely affected gambling. Erwin and other opponents of bingo said the proposed amendment had provisions that could have legalized gambling beyond Macon County.

A similar constitutional amendment proposed for Greene County bingo, sponsored by Sen. Bobby Singleton, D-Greensboro, did not come up.